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STATE FOR NEA/MAG

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KISL](#) [PTER](#) [MO](#)
SUBJECT: POLITICAL THEATER ENERGIZES THE BASE OF MOROCCO'S
LARGEST ISLAMIC POLITICAL PARTY

REF: A. RABAT 785
[1](#)B. RABAT 411

Classified By: CG Millard for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (U) SUMMARY: The Casablanca regional congress of the Islamist Party for Justice and Development (PJD) illustrated why the PJD is the best organized and most popular political party in Morocco and the largest opposition in Parliament. On November 1st, the party employed both populist and Islamic rhetoric and political theater to demonstrate its ability to engage and motivate the public. The large attendance, especially of younger people, and the professional execution of the event highlighted the PJD's political skills. The speeches given by the party's leadership focused mainly on excoriating the government for mismanagement and corruption, all the while reaffirming their allegiance to the King and carefully refraining from any direct criticism of the palace. They called on authorities to allow the more Islamist Adl wa Ihsane (the Justice and Charity Organization) to operate and cited Morocco's positive view of its Jewish minority. Current U.S. foreign policy in the region was roundly condemned, although party leader Benkirane publicly and positively welcomed the presence of Congen Poloff and praised his and the PJD's contacts with the Ambassador. Benkirane also condemned terrorism and violence in the name of Islam. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (U) On November 1, poloff attended the PJD's regional party conference in Casablanca along with local dignitaries including Mohammed Sajid, the Mayor of Casablanca from the Constitutional Union Party, as well as numerous journalists, and the party faithful. Poloff was welcomed into the VIP waiting room, introduced to the party leadership, and seated front and center at the proceedings. Poloff was the only foreign representative and was welcomed in the opening remarks.

A Warm Up:

[1](#)3. (U) Party officials and those working the event gathered in the entrance hall of the Roche Noire Theater to perform a communal prayer before guests arrived. The theater which holds approximately 700 was overflowing with people standing in the aisles as the event got under way. Veiled women were seated separately from the men to one side of the stage and a festive atmosphere spread through the audience as people began singing both popular and party songs. The audience was remarkable for having a substantial number of young people in their 20s and 30s in the crowd and also working in the reception area passing out literature and greeting arrivals.

[1](#)4. (U) A performance by the internationally renowned oud

player Haj Younes was followed by a group of young performers who sang in French, Arabic and English a song whose sole lyrics consisted of, "Every night and every day I never forget to say la ilah ila allah, (there is no god but God)." The musical entertainment was followed by a polished and professionally-edited video that highlighted the history of the party and extolled the party's leadership past and present.

Corruption, Waste and Mismanagement: Oh, My!

15. (U) The first two speakers fired up the crowd with energetic condemnations of the current state of Moroccan governance. The second speaker cited Morocco's deteriorating performance by citing international indicators including the NGOs Reporters without Borders for freedom of the press, Transparency International for corruption, and UNDP Human Development Report for education and health care. He criticized the court systems as overrun and corrupt and the education and health systems as failing all Moroccans. "Today there exists two Moroccos: one for the rich and one for the poor, one for the privileged and educated and one for the illiterate and popular masses. Our principal is to build one Morocco!" he concluded.

16. (U) Saadine Othmani, the Secretary General of the PJD from 2004 until he lost an internal election this summer, delivered his remarks with austere charisma. Othmani attacked the government for its recent sanction of the largest-circulation daily newspaper Al Missae eliciting wild cheers from the crowd. (Earlier in the week an appeals court

in Rabat upheld a 6 Million Dirham fine for in a civil defamation suit after the newspaper reported earlier this year that a deputy prosecutor in the small town of Ksar al Kebir had attended a gay wedding.) (Ref A) He characterized this as an attack on the fundamental freedom of the press. Othmani also hammered home the theme of corruption and incompetence on the part of the government and judicial system. He then moved on to attack US foreign policy in the Middle East, going so far as to say "we are against it in all its manifestations." We support the right of any country to fight back against occupation, he said, which was echoed with shouts of "Muqawama" or "Resistance" from the crowd.

Bringing Down the House

7 (U) Abdelillah Benkirane, the popular newly elected Secretary General of the party, was the last to speak. He introduced a note of levity by starting with a joke and speaking in the Moroccan dialect. Benkirane covered many of the same themes of corruption and failure by the government but his speech largely focused on Islam as the solution to the country's problems. He called for an improvement in relations with Algeria and for the opening of the border. He also demanded that the government recognize the rights of "our brothers" in the Adl wa Ihsane movement, a banned Islamic organization headed by Sheikh Abdessalam Yassine that does not recognize the legitimacy of the King.

18. (U) Islam is central to the Moroccan identity, said Benkirane, "it exists in the milk of every Moroccan woman," and is the bond between people whether they are Berber, Arab or Andalusian. "When the Jews were expelled from Spain in the 15th century," he said, "there was no UN, there were no human rights, there was no United States of America, there was no freedom. Why did they come to Morocco? Because this is a land of freedom and justice. This is an Islamic land."

Oath of Allegiance

19. (U) Benkirane was quick to condemn terrorism and violence

in the name of Islam. He repeated the PJD,s
allegiance to King Mohammed VI by saying, "We are nothing
without the king. He is the leader of the faithful and it is
appropriate that we say - God, Country, and King!"

A Little U.S. Bashing

¶10. (U) Benkirane also turned his sights on US foreign
policy, condemning US support for Israel and the occupation
of Iraq while affirming Morocco,s affinity for the plight of
the Palestinians. He denounced US policy in the region as,
"corrupt, illogical, and failed." However, taking a
conciliatory tone he pointed out that Ambassador Riley was
the only foreign ambassador to come and visit the PJD after
his election as the new party leader this summer. (Ref B) He
concluded, "The US Ambassador and the consul are welcome with
us anytime."

¶11. (C) COMMENT: The PJD has consistently shown itself to be
the best organized and motivated political party in Morocco.
While the PJD is universally admired among Moroccans for its
internal democracy - unheard of among Morocco,s fossilized
political parties - it is also viewed with trepidation by the
upper class as secretly wishing to impose an antiquated and
strict interpretation of Islam on the country. We remain
intrigued by reports that the PJD is looking for coalition
partners, particularly among the left, to counter the growing
block of center-right parties headed by palace confidant
Fouad Al Himma of the Modernity and Authenticity (PAM).
MILLARD